NEW-ARRIVAL-NESS AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT:

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports on an analysis of the notion of ‘new-arrival-ness’ based on discourses of different dimensions in a New Arrivals Program (NAP). It documents how a group of adult newcomers to Australia was represented, and then constructed, in discourses connected with their English as a Second Language (ESL) class.

The term “new arrivals” is approached as an experiential construct involving social and cultural contingencies. The impetus for the study was underpinned by my firsthand experiences in being positioned as a “new arrival” myself. Although the term “new arrivals” is used with different meanings, it does not refer to all newcomers to Australia. In the context of migrant education, the term refers to a particular subset of newcomers. Using a qualitative case study approach, this study investigated three interrelated aspects of an adult NAP programme: general programme documents, NAP ESL classroom teacher talk and ESL written tasks.

Analysis of the NAP programme documents identified varied meanings for “new arrivals” across federal, state and school levels as well as across educational stages. It also revealed how a deficit model of “new arrivals” was constructed and how such a model represented learners as different from the mainstream norm. The teacher's in-class talk was dominated by managerial and norm-setting functions. This was an interpretation of learners’ needs. Teacher talk served to codify norms for students to adopt. The norms represented a particular version of Australian culture which learners were expected to take on. Analysis of the NAP writing tasks illustrated how they were organised around the themes of new arrivals and life in Australia, positioning normative value positions and influencing available responses in the final assessment task.

The analysis portrays “new arrivals” and mainstream Australian society in a dialectical relationship, each defined in relation to the other. The study concludes with comments on the implications of this portrayal of programmes for newcomers.
DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968, when it is accepted for the award of the degree.

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Signed: ___________________________ Date: ________________
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

(Listing the ones used multiple times only)

ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics
AMEP: Adult Migrant English Program
DECS: Department of Education and Children's Services
DEEWR: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DEST: Department of Education, Science and Training
DETE: Department of Education Training and Employment
DIAC: Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DIMIA: Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
EDNs: Educational Norms
ESL: English as a Second Language
ESL-NA: English as a Second Language (New Arrivals Programme)
ESL-GSP: English as a Second Language (General Support Programme)
NAP: New Arrivals Program
SACE: South Australian Certificate of Education
SCNs: Sociocultural Norms
SFL: Systemic Functional Linguistics